

Gwinn

Bratenahl, Ohio

Photographs by Alan Ward 1996

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Gwinn was the estate of William Mather of Cleveland, Ohio, who owned multiple businesses, including making Great Lakes steamships to carry iron ore. Architect Charles A. Platt worked with landscape architect Warren Manning on the site perched above the shore of Lake Erie, beginning in 1906. Platt was an architect, engraver, painter and landscape designer who was inspired by Italian villas and gardens. He designed buildings and sites with a unified approach aiming for one coherent composition, informed by his background in fine arts. Manning was a landscape architect who had worked in Olmsted's office and done many projects with the Mather family.*

Platt designed a Renaissance style villa with a semi-circular portico oriented northward toward the lake, along with a symmetrical pair of long concave seawalls extending outward, that seem to embrace the water (15,17). The north portico is an outdoor room with two symmetrical sets of curving steps down to a terrace and the lake edge, where a pair of recumbent lions on seawalls appear to mark a boat landing (17). On the south side, Platt and Manning departed from the axial symmetry that characterizes Italian gardens. Rather than a central approach drive to the house, there is a south-facing lawn with clusters of trees on each side that frame a filtered view to the house from Lakeshore Boulevard. The entrance drive and service drive hug the western and eastern property lines of the site. On the east side, Manning located a woodland garden (8,9) and later added a twenty-acre wild garden south of Lakeshore Boulevard, that is no longer part of the property. On the west side of the central lawn is a pergola and flower

garden organized around a central north to south axis (4-6).

I started the photography with the house and worked out from there to depict the designed relationship of the house, or villa, to the lake as the fundamental organizing element of the plan. This was the north side of the residence, so it had to be soft overcast light to avoid the lake background appearing to be too bright in views of the house, portico and terraces. I began the photography immediately after a morning rainfall, which left ideal conditions. The wet surfaces added a definite richness to the images and suggested a recession of values in the black and white tones that would not be visible otherwise. The north portico is a vertically proportioned architectural space that required a view camera with an extreme wide-angle lens (10,11). The most emblematic image of Platt's integration of the architecture with the landscape is the view down the steps to Lake Erie. It was framed to the limits of a wide-angle lens with the front lowered to keep the architectural elements vertical (12). The image shows Lake Erie with calm peaceful water after a summer rainfall that is reminiscent of Italian gardens in the Lake District (17). Imagine this scene in winter with ice on Lake Erie buffeting against the walls. The woodland garden on the east side is a counterpoint to Platt's architectural classicism (8,9). The woodland garden, appearing overgrown, is a vestige of a larger composition that once extended southward. The loggia and west flower garden, replanted by Ellen Shipman in 1914, retain the character and spirit of the original design (4-6).

List of Photographs

1. View west of the arrival court, drive and vase from the house
2. Entrance gate from arrival court to west flower garden
3. View north from the west garden to the arrival court
4. Pergola on north side of west garden and entry facade
5. Fortuna fountain and pool in west garden
6. View north on axis to west flower garden and pergola
7. South façade on the great lawn and entrance to pergola
8. View from arbor to woodland garden on east side of house
9. Arbor in woodland garden and house beyond
10. View of north portico and lakefront pavilion beyond
11. View east from under the north portico
12. Stairs from north portico to lakeside terrace and fountain
13. View back to north portico, stairs and fountain
14. View west to path and lakefront pavilion
15. Lakefront pavilion and concave seawall
16. View east to path and pavilion
17. Recumbent sea lions flanking steps to Lake Erie



































Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Ward, Alan, *American Designed Landscapes: A Photographic Interpretation*, 1998

Ward, Alan, "American Designed Landscapes," *View Camera: The Journal of Large-Format Photography*, January/February 1999

Exhibitions of the Photographs:

"Luminous Landscapes: Photographs by Alan Ward" The National Building Museum, 2016

"American Designed Landscapes: Space and Light" Sarasota Center for Architecture, 2018

* For more on Platt, Manning, Mather and Gwinn see the chapter "Gwinn: Creation of a New American Landscape" in *Shaping an American Landscape: The Art and Architecture of Charles A. Platt* by Keith N. Morgan. It is well-researched from the family archives, correspondence, drawings and other documents, and a very interesting account of the site selection, design and construction of Gwinn.

All Photographs © Alan Ward